Depot Town Rag

Volume 24, Number 4

June 2009

Knock, knock!
Who's there?
Freight.
Freight who?
Freight you'd never get back in?

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

City locked the doors, turned over the keys

Ypsilanti's historic Freighthouse reached the zenith of community love, involvement, and creativity—and it all stopped when the City decided the structure was about to collapse around our shoulders if we kept singing and dancing the way we had become accustomed to doing over the years.

"Friends" organized

Freighthouse Business Plan is in place and the campaign to restore the building gets underway this month

After five years of locked doors, a plan is in place to get them open for access to Ypsilanti's community center once again. Friends of the Ypsilanti Freighthouse have finalized their business plan to restore and revitalize the 1878 structure alongside the tracks in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town.

Check out FOYF's Website to see how you can help get those doors open again:

www.foyf.org

"Let's Get The Doors Open!"
FOYF's campaign poster to feature the many doors into this venerable structure

FOYF wants to open these doors

Sixteen men and ten horses paused along the west dock for this commemorative photo of life at the MCRR Freighthouse at Ypsilanti. [Photo source: Earnest Griffin]

Freighthouse awarded MDOT grant

Michigan communities get $47.3 M economic boost from Transportation Enhancement Funding

Governor Jennifer Granholm and Congressman John Dingell came to Depot Town in April to announce that the city of Ypsilanti will finally be able to restore the historic Freighthouse located in Depot Town. The budget for the Recovery Act project is $500,000 and will include major structural improvements to foundation, floor, walls, pilasters, roof and interior mechanical systems. These items, outlined in a Conditional Assessment Report, are required to re-open the 1878 facility, which is planned to serve as a community center, farmers market, café and education center.

67 communities in 27 Michigan counties will benefit from a total of $47.3 million in transportation enhancement funding. This includes 22 projects funded through the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act). The projects are planned for the 2009 and 2010 construction seasons and will create or retain more than 1,300 jobs.

Transportation enhancement grants enable communities to invest in streetscape improvements, recreational path development and historic structure improvements such as the Freighthouse.

Pfizer grant goes to Freighthouse

Pfizer Foundation's $1 million grant stretched all the way to the Ypsilanti Freighthouse, it was announced in late March. Pledged as they were closing their research labs here, the "big idea" grants and Ypsilanti renewal grants are handled by the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation.

Friends of the Ypsilanti Freighthouse received $103,300 for architectural and engineering blueprints to prepare the freighthouse for federal and state grants. They were among 42 applicants for the "big idea" grants.

Other recipients included the Food Gatherers Big Community Harvest ($92,000), Ann Arbor Ecology Center ($58,000), SPARK East ($50,000), and the Early College Alliance collaboration between EMU, WISD, and the Ypsilanti, Lincoln, Milan, and Whitmore Lake School districts ($300,000).

1/2 million $ check given for Freighthouse rehab project

[photo by John Harrington]

State Rep Alma Wheeler-Smith, US Congressman John Dingell, Governor Jennifer Granholm, Mayor Paul Schreiber, FOYF co-chairs Bonnie Penet & Natalie Edmunds.

Ypsilanti's historic Freighthouse goes by the numbers:

1878
Date of construction by Michigan Cenral Railroad

6,552
Square feet of interior

1979
City of Ypsilanti takes ownership

1997
Placed on State Register of Historic Places

2004
Closed by City Building Inspectors

400,000
$ needed to get the doors open again

A Freighthouse time line:

23 March 1878
Groundbreaking

6 July 1878
D.A. Wise brings first freight

1913-16
Locals store cars indoors for the winter

29 March 1920
Several Detroit auto companies begin deliveries

1950s-1970s
Furniture storage facility

1976
Artrain's first stop uses portion as art gallery

4 August 1979
Farmers' Market opens

1988
City unveils development plan

1989
City plan falls short of goal

July 1989
Volunteers build trackside dock

2004
City closes facility

2005
Friends formed

2009
Friends business plan begins restoration

When the train starts stopping *here* again...

Looking "west" from Cross & River Street intersection:
House track to the Freighthouse Sidetrack Main Line to Chicago

What if predictions for the very near future come true? Members of the Depot Town Downtown Development Authority predict Ann Arbor/Detroit commuter trains will be stopping here every morning and evening beginning in 2010. Might such a reality take the neighborhood back to its original intent and purpose? And, if it did, would daily train stops best serve the current life of this community?

"Just like the good old days," shout enthusiastic supporters who remember twenty-five trains a day stopping in Ypsilanti during World War II. They fondly recall a vital commercial district of train whistles and tears at the Michigan Central Railroad depot. Some even remember when our taverns opened in the early hours of the morning to serve the needs of railroad workers. Will that kind of nostalgia return?

In early May, City Council decided to place a platform/loading dock for the 2010 commuter train on the west side of the tracks, north of the Freighthouse.

The past may have become our future, say old hands along the tracks in Ypsilanti; an articulated transportation system where travelers can make connections via private autos, rail service, Interstate highways, and airlines. Might we soon bring back the Ann Arbor & Ypsilanti Electric Railway ((1896-1925) interurban street railway service?

"A vacant mid-block lot affords access and view to the area north of Cross Street. Development of a Market can be closely tied to the other uses in Depot Town" -'76 Study

What we'd like to see in Ypsi's venerable Freighthouse

List-makers attended many planning sessions last winter:

- Year 'round Farmers' Market
- Builders' Home & Garden Show
- Holiday events
- Saturday morning coffee and music
- More music, art, and theatre
- All that jazz again!
- Spring flower & garden show
- Model railroad layout & displays
- Balls, cotillions, & fancy events
- Movies for kids
- Quilt show
- Halloween events
- Auto shows by local dealers
- Championship wrestling
- Craft shows

..and, most of all, OPEN to our community once more!

What's left of the Michigan Central complex at Ypsilanti

- **Freight House** *(original condition)*
- **Depot** *(abandoned ruin)*
- **Rail Sidings** *(some still in place)*
- **Crossing Guard Tower** *(replicated)*

LOST:
- **Rail Yard**
- **Roundhouse**
- **Gardens**
- **Greenhouse**
- **Telegraph Office**
- **Stockyards**
- **Water Tank**
- **Wood Shed**
- **Oil Tank**

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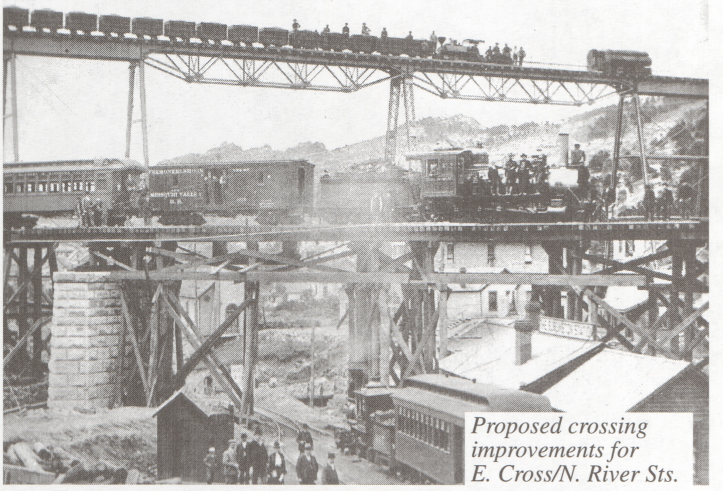

Proposed crossing improvements for E. Cross/N. River Sts.

Freighthouse factoid:

One of the neighborhood's many tunnels ran underneath the MCRR tracks at the height of the depot gardens period. It carried heat from the boiler in the greenhouse just north of the depot to the freighthouse on the opposite side of the tracks.

From the Freighthouse to Frenchie's: In the hey-days of the Freighthouse and Depot here, neighborhood bars opened at 7 a.m.

1/2 million $ stimulus met by local bucks, too

You can help save this important landmark

The Freighthouse is a 125-year-old Depot Town landmark, built alongside the railroad tracks to handle freight for the Michigan Central Railroad. The City purchased the Freighthouse in 1979, and it housed the Ypsilanti Farmers' Market for 25 years.

In 2004, the City closed the Freighthouse, both because their insurers feared the building's collapse and had withdrawn coverage and because the City did not have money to pay for needed capital improvements or ongoing maintenance.

A non-profit group, the Friends of the Ypsilanti Freighthouse (FOYF), took over the management of the Freighthouse in January 2005, and has been raising money to pay for needed improvements. As of March 2006, the group had raised $31,000 in donations and qualified for a $25,000 grant from the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, and continues to make repairs in time to welcome the 2010 return of the commuter train. In the meantime, the Ypsilanti Depot Town Farmers' Market meet in the Market Plaza.

A lot of work has been done on the building since it was closed: The 12" x 8' beam under the café floor was replaced with like material from an old barn. Electrical repairs and upgrades have been done. A Homeland Security grant provided security and fire/smoke alarm systems. In addition to the $31,000 in donations and from the President's Ball, and $25,000 from State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and matching for the C.A.R., FOYF secured another grant from SHPO which is nearly complete for a thorough storm water management project (new fascia, gutters, downspouts and drains to an on-site retention area (rain garden). FOYF has received donations for the rain garden completion from the, Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation, the Ypsilanti Garden Club, and private donors. We also continue to get financial support from the DTDDA.

You can help to open the Freighthouse

Supporters can help with fundraising ideas if they are willing to do the work to make it happen, say FOYF activists. Recent fundraisers have included Full Freight Banjo, dinners at Frenchie's, Haab's, and Café Luwak; and EMU Preservation's Chili Cookoff.

Expressing interest and support is good, they say, and offering specific skills toward that end is even better. Specific skills needed include grant research and writing, business community outreach, and professional event planning.

Check the Friends of the Ypsilanti Freighthouse Website:

www.foyf.org

for information and updates

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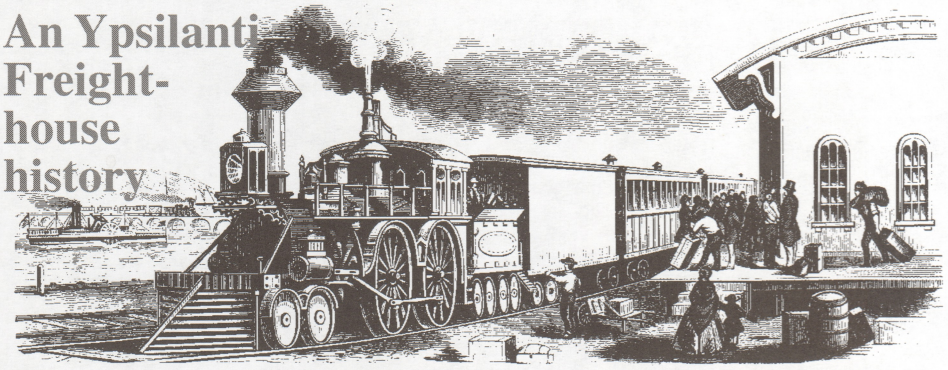
An Ypsilanti Freight-house history



The 6552 square foot Ypsilanti Freighthouse was completed in July of 1878 by contractor, C. T. Douglas of Aurora, Illinois, in response to increased railroad freight commerce. The rectangular one-story red brick building is constructed on a timber-frame with mortised and tenoned joints and has a low-pitched, gabled roofline, originally finished in standing seam metal. Ten heavy wooden cargo bay doors rise and close with counterweights. The architecture is commercial Italianate adapted for this use. To this day, the building remains original and little changed.

The Ypsilanti Freighthouse played a vital role in the growth and development of Ypsilanti and Southeastern Michigan. The railroad established Ypsilanti as a center for the transportation of raw materials and goods out of the area. Manufacturing, commercial and retail businesses flourished with the railroad and the Freighthouse. By 1885, The Ypsilanti Dress Stay Company alone had shipping sales of $300,000 in one year. During the same period a mineral water enterprise sent 200 box cars a month to the east. By 1887, 100,000 barrels of flour were shipped to eastern markets every year. Ypsilanti Underwear sent huge shipments to London and Paris. Products of dozens of Ypsilanti factories were loaded from the Freighthouse and shipped all over the United States and abroad.

While rail freight traffic decreased after World War II, the Freighthouse remained in use as a warehouse until 1979, when the City of Ypsilanti acquired the building to use as a community and events center. Since then, the Ypsilanti Freighthouse has also become the focal point for the Depot Town Farmers' Market.

In 1997, the Freighthouse was listed on the State Register of Historic Places, and remains a key site within Ypsilanti's Historic District, which is on the Department of Interior's National Register of Historic Places.

The Ypsilanti Freighthouse is now owned by the City of Ypsilanti and is protected for historic preservation purposes under the terms of a 99-year easement with the State of Michigan. The Friends of the Ypsilanti Freighthouse renewed their Management Agreement with the City on September 8, 2008 for a term of five years. The agreement obligates the FOYF to preserve and restore and otherwise renovate the site, as well as to operate the site on a self-sustaining basis. *-From FOYF's Business Plan*

In the next *Rag*:
Listen to the music of Ypsilanti's old railroad district

Depot Town Rag

"All the news that fits, we print"
A monthly publication of
The Depot Town Association, Inc.
c/o The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198
Gary McKeever, President
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Rag editor: thomasdodd@comcast.net
DTA meets at 6:30 p.m on the third Wednesday of each month at Café Luwak, 42 East Cross Street.

Dubious railroad history:

First jazz musicians arrive for Freighthouse performance: The Boston Musical Saw Sextet

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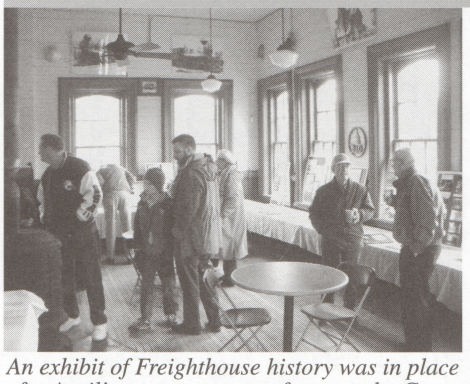
"Coffee Shop" of today was originally the Freight Office

"Ypsilanti Michigan Central Freight Office About 1921: Will Mowrer, Frank Susella, Alva Hunter" SOURCE: Sidetrack's Linda French

Ypsi's ancient edifice still accomodates loyal locals & gushing guests



An exhibit of Freighthouse history was in place for April's announcement of support by Governor Granholm and the building safely held nearly 200 enthusiastic well-wishers

Let's get our old Freighthouse doors open again!

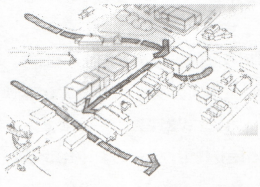
This may be Ypsilanti's best shot at a community center/auditorium

Hundreds turned out to welcome Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm and U.S. Congressman John Dingle in April when they came to the Freighthouse to present the $500,000 economic stimulus check. Such festive community events are part of the tradition here.

Detroit has its Cobo Hall; Chicago has the McCormick Center. In NYC, it's Madison Square Garden and the Lincoln Center. But in Ypsilanti, it's the old railroad Freighthouse where the entire community has been coming together for more than a hundred years.

Our Freighthouse has gone from a sorting station for Ypsilanti products about to be shipped around the world to winter storage for Model T Fords. This 182' x36' building along the Detroit/Chicago railroad tracks saw another period when it was used as a furniture storage facility, but Depot Towners were able to persuade the City to wrest it from such ignominy and turn it into a venue for an expanded Farmers' Market, musical events, theatrical productions, trade shows, and holiday expositions.

During the several years of jazz concerts with DTA/WEMU, a famed performer noted, "You've got a better performance space than New Orleans' over-sold Preservation Hall."



1976 Depot Town Study *showed pedestrian routes at a time when not many people were walking around the old railroad district*

Ypsi's three-year-old Sadie Klutzman ran the toughest section crew between Detroit/Chicago

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Coming down the track:

• CELEBRATE!

Aubree's Chief Operations Officer Bob Roberts is managing the change-over of the former Cady's restaurant at 36 E. Cross into **Celebrations!**, a banquet and catering facility that will seat 250 by the time remodeling is complete in November. Already hosting fund-raisers, reunions, a late EMU graduation party, and wedding receptions, **Celebrations!** will see the return of chef Chad Clay and banquet coordinator Chris Hunt. Service staff and porters will draw from the Aubree's pool and add a banquet chef and assistants. Roberts sees buffet banquet prices ranging from $8.99 to $50 per person as well as plated events in this unique full-service dining emporium.

• ENERGY!

The Energy Outlet, Depot Town's newest innovative storefront, will be opening early this month at 44 East Cross Street, next to Café Luwak. The Energy Outlet is a retail and educational space dedicated to helping customers learn about reducing their energy use (and bills!) and use cleaner energy products. Products and information supporting water and energy conservation, home insulation and weatherization, and alternative energy products fill the store, with experts in the clean energy field available on-site to answer your questions. In addition, the Energy Outlet will host eco-conscious seminars in a "Green Classroom." Attendees will get to learn about a wide variety of subjects presented by the area's leaders in the green economy.

The Energy Outlet is the latest project of the Clean Energy Coalition (CEC), a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to promoting clean energy technologies as a way to create healthier, energy independent communities. CEC implements, manages, and evaluates cost effective, market transformation projects and programs in the building and transportation sectors. CEC's current programs and projects include Rebuild Ypsilanti, Clean Cities, Solar America Cities, BIG, and Michigan Energy $ense.

Energy Outlet
HOME OF THE CLEAN ENERGY COALITION
Green Energy Products
Green Classroom
44 East Cross Street
next to Café Luwak
GRAND OPENING!

RAGTIME Coming events

June 7
ORPHAN CAR SHOW

Tuesdays, June/Sept
MOTORCYCLE MANIA

Thursdays, June/September
CRUISE NIGHTS

June 18
Ypsilanti Community Band
CONCERT

June 27-28
RELAY FOR LIFE
Brought 300+ people to the block and raised $63,000 last year!

July 3, 4, 5
Michigan CAMARO Superfest

July 10 & 11
MICHIGAN ELVISFEST

July 16
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CONCERT

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Left: Cooke advises a client
Right: Emmett is a traditionalist

Tattoo Parlour opens with City's blessings

April saw new excitement as neighbors debated the opening of a new business at 33 East Cross. Dawn Cooke & Mike Emmett persevered to bring us the **Depot Town Tattoo Parlour** at the site of the Fraternal Order of Eagles where WWII vets sat around the bar comparing tattoos from the Navy.

Why are people getting tattoos today? Cooke notes that "Tattoos still say you're tough. Maybe it's a reflection of having been through tough times. It can be psychological, social, or physical." Vanity, too. Body adornment has taken on new popularity with a younger generation.

Tattoos are "New Wave," say Cooke and Emmett. "It's a new standard and a viable art form. Not retro, but retro imagery."

The "parlour" not only includes the "u", but it's newly decorated with a ceramic tile floor, lots of light, and it's clean as a dental lab.

Cooke brings many of her former clientele from Ann Arbor's Name Brand Tattoos where she worked for seven years.

A new business must consider the competition. Are there boundaries in the tatt-biz? Cooke says they can't be too close, even with the City's new standards. "Reputation will grow to dominate the vicinity," she says. "High quality will carry the day."

Depot Town Tattoo Parlour: depottowntattoo@gmail.com. Phone: 544-1297 Websites: www.dawncooke.com or www.mikeemmett.com

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